

# Media Representations. Power Language, Political Myths and Symbols

## CULTURAL STUDIES, MULTICULTURALISM, AND MEDIA CULTURE

- ⊙ Radio, television, film, and the other products of **media culture** provide materials out of which we forge our very identities; our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality; and of "us" and "them."
- ⊙ ***Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil.***
- ⊙ Media stories provide the **symbols, myths, and resources** through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture. **Media spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless**, who is allowed to exercise force and violence, and who is not.

(Douglas Kellner)

- ⊙ **As Horsfield argues, "we are living in a mediated consumer culture in which people organise and express themselves in relation to the demands of the mass media".**
- ⊙ We could actually speak of this mediated consumer culture a phenomenon overwhelmingly powerful in which exercises power at all levels (from emotional to political impact)
- ⊙ Critics have asked themselves if the **power of media** can lead to a substitution of the institutional roles and attributes of religion and its impact.
- ⊙ While we agree that this **power replacement** exists (see above our perspective on a new media domination), we believe that it is not a substitution taking place at one level (of the attributes or roles) but a multilayered paradigm substitution, due to the complex needs of expression of a society built itself out of a complex network of ideas, expressions, needs, knowledge, cultures, whose interconnection and interpermeability is sometimes more significant than their individual values.
- ⊙ Within this **multileveled power replacement paradigm, the "implicit" aspect plays an important role in the impact these recycled patterns or values possess, while the ambiguity, mimicry or disguises interplay phenomena or processes that can be read as "authentic".**  
Deacy, [www.waccglobal.org](http://www.waccglobal.org) (accessed February, 2012)
- ⊙ The hidden, disguised aspects can mainly be associated with the concepts of manipulation and propaganda, while media exploits precisely that human prototypical need for meaning and coherence we discussed above. As Sandu Frunză argues:

- > “Mass media plays an important part both with respect to mythical creation and its function, which in archaic societies was fulfilled by mythical communication instances... ***Mass media valorizes myth as an ethical mode of responding to human needs*** that are always forgotten, always postponed, but pertain to the human condition and its protection. In this context, mass media is responsible for the elaboration and implementation of *politics of symbolic construction of reality*, both at the level of mass culture and of very elaborate professional culture [emphasis added]”. (194-5).

## New Media

- ◎ **New media** is a broad term in [media studies](#) that emerged in the latter part of the [20th century](#). For example, new media holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content any time, anywhere, on any [digital device](#), as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of new media is the "[democratization](#)" of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. Another aspect of new media is the real-time generation of new, unregulated content.
- ◎ [Wikipedia](#), an online encyclopedia, is an example, combining [Internet](#) accessible digital text, images and video with web-links, creative participation of contributors, interactive feedback of users and formation of a participant community of editors and donors for the benefit of non-community readers. [Facebook](#) is an example of the [social media](#) model, in which most users are also participants.
- ◎ There are undoubtedly others, and much of the point of the changing landscape is to emphasize the “new” in “**new media**,” the emergent, difficult to detect, uneven, diffuse, dispersed, even contradictory effects and manifestations thereof.
- ◎ **These “new” forms feed upon, without displacing, radio, broadcast television, cable, satellite, video, theatrical exhibition, print journalism, and, of course, cinema.**
- ◎ Despite the frequent emphasis on the new, however, it is equally possible to place an emphasis on the continuity of new media with previous forms, such as the cinema, as to mark divergences.

Yet these observations only begin to open onto questions about how new media will *function*:

***does the new media landscape offer greater opportunities for public participation? For coalition building? For innovative art? For research and teaching? For fresh thinking? Who will own the new media? Who will control it?***

These questions animate, as it were, current discussions in the public sphere, and they should, since it is not simply a matter of building theory that can accommodate new media but building worlds that benefit from it, too.

**If film, then, belongs to this new media landscape, it does so as a dimension of culture, and culture itself is changing.**

- Most technologies described as "new media" are digital, often having characteristics of being [manipulated](#), networkable, [dense](#), [compressible](#), and [interactive](#). Some examples may be the [Internet](#), websites, computer multimedia, [video games](#), CD-ROMS, and DVDs. New media does not include [television programs](#), feature films, [magazines](#), [books](#), or paper-based publications – unless they contain technologies that enable digital interactivity.
- Each new technological development (sound, panchromatic stock, color) points out to viewers just how “unrealistic” the previous image was and also reminds them that the present image, even though more realistic, will also be superseded in the future – thus constantly sustaining the state of disavowal. (Manovich 2001: 186)
- Digital cinema thus continues a project begun long ago, further developing a form that is the product of certain variables and potentialities, just as some of its cherished forms (such as narrative) yield to others (such as the database).
- Manovich’s emphasis on the continuity of digital cinema with cinema’s previous incarnations provides a helpful antidote against hand-wringing Puritanism that worries about medium specificity.
  - **Media studies, digital media, digital art, art history, visual studies, visual culture, cultural studies, media convergence, new media;** these are some of their names.
  - If we retain a sense of engagement and fascination with the image, combined with a curiosity about film’s role in inspiring new forms of social life, we will have bequeathed something durable and vital to you, the next generation of film scholars.

## **Conclusions**

- Our life – for those of us with the gift of sight at least – is visual.
- We know the world and live the world visually. The images in our eyes are our most vivid engagement with the world around us, almost more vivid than the words, sounds, and ideas in our minds – the other major contact points between us and our cultural world.
- Those images come to us from many sources – the news, movies, the Internet, magazines, and so on. Each image is like a peephole in that it only affords us a very limited vision of things that have a much greater amplitude.
- Most images come to us as part of narratives, stories that pattern our experience of the world in a temporal sequence that is also logical and is informed with valuations.
- “a culture which is pervaded at all levels by a host of cultural technologies designed to **disseminate viewing and looking** practices through primarily visually mediated forms provides a

challenge for those seeking to trace the way in which 'the image' is invariably articulated within the picturing sensibilities of a wider 'visual culture" (Evans and Hall, 7)

### Visual Culture and Media Culture

- ◎ As the influential Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (1999) argue, when discussing visual culture:
  - > ***"The mechanically and electronically reproduced image is the semantic and technical unit of the modern mass media and at the heart of post-war popular culture.***
  - > *"Visual culture holds a mirror to contemporary life because it both represents elements of a preexisting reality, and constitutes reality - in - the -making by encouraging people to organize their own experience through imitation of what they see" (Ryan and Ingram,, 2010, 145).*

"Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world within words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled." (Berger 1972: 4 )